

Len Fagnan

April 24, 2009

LF: I became president in 1992, but I was an active member since 1981.

Q: And you're now a CUPE national representative.

LF: That's correct.

Q: What happened in '92?

LF: In 1992 the province government had mandated a 5% rollback, which affected all workers in the province. I was also, being president of CUPE Local 8, I was also the chairperson of the Alberta Hospital Employees Committee, which did the bargaining provincially for all the hospitals. At that time, in the process of bargaining, we had satisfied the 5% rollback through a process of vacation, wage rollbacks, and it came to 5%. We achieved a memorandum of agreement, and the memorandum of agreement went to each of the hospitals across the province and each local voted on it on an individual basis. It was accepted by all the locals except for the Calgary General Hospital. The Calgary General Hospital said they could not sign that memorandum of agreement because they had to achieve further cutbacks from the laundry workers. It was strictly related in 1992 and '93, there was an issue of the General Hospital board saying they had to achieve savings there, and they were going to achieve those savings rolling back the laundry workers a further 10%.

Q: Had Local 8 voted on that?

LF: Local 8 had voted and accepted the memorandum. The Calgary General Hospital board at that time had rejected it, and they had rejected it on the grounds of one group of people.

Q: So they had segregated the laundry workers out for a special rollback. What happened with that?

LF: The basis of it at that time was that you had a choice – you accept the cuts or you lose your job to contracting out. They did the bargaining and when we took it back to the laundry workers they voted on it if they were going to accept the cutbacks, and they agreed to do that. Then we voted on the whole memorandum of agreement. So there was a special letter of understanding just for the laundry workers.

Q: Were there any other elements to it, other than special rollbacks?

LF: There was just basically the wage rollback. What the Calgary General Hospital was saying was that the cost for a pound of laundry was \$1.20 and they needed to get it down to 95 cents. The basis of it is they had to do that because the Calgary General Hospital laundry did most of the laundry for all the other hospitals. In 1988 they had consolidated all the laundries into one laundry, and it was on that site. All except for the Foothills – they kept their own laundry. But there were five hospitals in Calgary, so all the laundry segregated into that one site.

Q: How many laundry workers were there at that site?

LF: I believe there was approximately 60.

Q: What were their wages like?

LF: Before the cuts and rollbacks, there was a standard rate at that time I believe of about \$12 or \$13 an hour. At the time prior to '92-'93, there was a basic rate of pay, for

example, housekeeping, dietary, the laundry, were all paid at that same basic rate of pay. When we achieved the memorandum of agreement, they all moved up equally until 1992; then the laundry rates actually fell below that standard rate.

Q: So the other hospitals would pay Calgary General Hospital to do their laundry?

LF: That's correct. They were contracting out, or they got contracts from the other hospitals. The linen from the other hospitals would come to the laundry. The Calgary General Hospital Board was the controller and considered the employer of that laundry. So therefore all the other hospitals would pay the Calgary General Hospital board to have their laundry done there.

Q: So Calgary General's relationship to the other hospitals would determine what price they had to pay, because they were acting as contractor?

LF: That's right; they set the price.

Q: So the burden of what was going on in the laundry fell on local 8.

LF: That's correct.

Q: They must have felt at that point that they were being discriminated against.

LF: They were. In the process itself, they were. But in consideration of that was their job, that's what would happen to them. It basically just fell on their shoulders. The other thing that happened the year prior, just to put the fear into the laundry workers, is that Calgary General Hospital had contracted out the housekeeping department. So the thought process was already established that either you bend or you break. What they did in doing the contracting out of the housekeeping – I think it was Marriott that actually got the contract for that – that started the trend that privatization was something that they weren't just threatening, they were more than willing to do it.

Q: But what they did with the housekeeping wasn't a part of negotiations?

LF: No, it wasn't negotiated, it was a done deal. In other words, they came to us, and this is what was happening in the '80s and '90s, they'd come knocking on your door and say, by the way, here's your notice, we've now contracted out. They'd give us very preliminary notice on that.

Q: So then we get to the laundry workers' strike in 1995.

LF: A couple of things had happened. One of the things that happened was the benchmark sent by the Calgary General Hospital was reached, and they reduced the cost of laundry significantly, not just through the wage rollbacks but also through their ability to do their job. The second thing that happened was in April of 1995 the Calgary General Hospital Board was disbanded and all the hospital boards were disbanded and came into a regionalization. We ended up with a new employer and it was the Calgary Regional Health Authority. Unfortunately, the person that was the chair of the Calgary Regional Health Authority was also a businessman. One of the things that happened is the Calgary Regional Health Authority did not have health workers on the board. They had businessmen on the board, they had government political appointees on the board, because this was an appointed board, not an elected board. So that changed the dynamics of everything in 1995 for the hospitals. The third thing that was happening is that the government had done a study on the hospitals in Calgary and Edmonton. In that study they had recommended that the two downtown hospitals close, so they were going to close the Holy Cross and they were going to close the Calgary General Hospital. So it was slated to be closed. That was something else of the dynamics of what was going on.

Q: So there were a number of factors that worked against the workers.

LF: In looking back, it affected the people in the laundry more, because if they closed the Calgary General Hospital, the Calgary General Hospital was directly linked to the Peter

Lougheed, which was a new hospital that had opened and wasn't running at full capacity. So a lot of the support staff in closing the hospital had the ability to actually go to the Peter Lougheed, and they were just going to transfer location. But the laundry was one building and it was attached to the Calgary General Hospital.

Q: There wasn't a laundry at the Peter Lougheed?

LF: There was no laundry at the Peter Lougheed. The only other laundry was the one at the Foothills, and it had been around for a long time.

Q?:

LF: No, not at the time. But in the process they decided in 1995 the new employer, they came and said, officially we're going to put out a tender for the laundry. So that led them to believe we're not going to survive that. In their minds it wasn't a matter of if, it was a matter of when.

Q: They had lost more than most workers during the cut?

LF: It's almost like the process, in consideration of what happened to them in 1995, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. They had given and they had done what they could to maintain their jobs.

Q: So it was already pretty much decided that the Calgary General Hospital would be closed. But was the laundry to remain standing?

LF: This is something that developed in 1995. A couple things that happened was that they announced to us in June to Local 8 that they would be putting out tenders for the laundry. What that meant was that that was going to take two or three months and they would allow people to bid on it. One of the things the employer did was they approached Local 8 and asked if we would like to put in a tender. Our problem was we were not

going to be the employer. They indicated to us that if you put in a tender and could be the successful bidder, that they would still maintain and be the employer. So we did actually put together a tender in the process. So we were now involved in the process. In the past we'd always been after the fact and had to fight the fight to keep anything they were trying to contract out. This time they let us in the front door rather than telling us about it at the back door. They even put a financial of supporting us financially, and they said they would support us up to I believe \$15,000 for us to put a tender together. We know nothing about the tender business. The tenders that the other groups were putting together, I found out after the fact, they were probably putting maybe \$75,000 or \$100,000 into the tenders, because they would get professional people in. We did get somebody from the university. One of the laundry workers, Liva Pisetti, had been in the laundry and she was the president of Local 8 at one time; she helped the fellow put the tender together because she knew the business. It was through her help that we put more of a credible bid together than they expected us to. We were allowed in the tender process but we were not allowed to associate with anybody else that was actually bidding on the laundry. They had tours, they would take them on tours, but we were not allowed to do that. If we wanted to do a tour we could do it on our own and we could come in and look. Yes, we were a part of the process but no, we weren't really part of the process.

Q: ?

LF: One of the things about the Calgary Regional Health Authority is they talked to nobody. They had a closed-door perspective. Their basic attitude was the public be damned, and we're going to do what we need to do to make healthcare work. There was no perspective on it but it was basically about the money and about the building.

Q: How did you find out you didn't get the bid?

LF: This would've been in November of 1995. They actually in the process had a meeting with ourselves. They also had a meeting with the Foothills group. They were at that time represented by AUPE. So they brought both of us together. This was at the

Calgary General Hospital. They announced at that time that we were not successful. At the same time they also announced that they would be giving notice to the laundry workers. They would not be giving them any severance and they would not be giving them any extra support to help them find jobs. They were going to get notice. They wanted them to stay and work another month. The K-Bro, which is the outfit in Edmonton, was the successful bidders. They would be closing the laundry and the laundry would be shipped to Edmonton, cleaned, and shipped back. Taking the labour perspective out of it and going back into the bidding process, one of the things that was part of our bid was that we were able to bid and the laundry had a three-day turnaround. In other words, you didn't have to have the volume of sheets and the volume as they needed. The K-Bro bid had to have a seven-day turnaround. Not only did they have to kickstart the process in closing the laundry, they also had to buy bulk linen because it would take seven days for a dirty sheet to leave the city, go to K-Bro in Edmonton, get cleaned, and get back in cycle of the system. Those things came out in the wash after they told us, but that was some of the stuff they started to talk about.

Q: ?

LF: I guess the saying is, believe your gut feeling. When they led us into the process the gut feeling was that they're setting us up to fail. In us not being successful in the bid, said that. They weren't just contracting out the laundry, they were also closing it. That fell right into the perspective of the closing of the General Hospital.

Q: They let you in on the bidding progress, so you couldn't go to the public and...?

LF: That's right, that's one of the perspectives of what their plan was, to be able to take us out of doing anything and doing the public fight in order to keep this laundry open. We were at the same time Friends of Medicare working with a number of different groups to say that the wrong decision was to close the Calgary General Hospital. So this was part of it. The other part about closing the hospital, there were a couple things that were happening. One, the director of the laundry, who had been there for mega years, he

retired. When he retired, they started to put people to look after the laundry that knew nothing about laundry. As each one moved on, they would fall lower and lower on the ladder of authorization. That was taking place. They were also now condemning a building, saying this building is going to be condemned, even though it was only 10 years old. It was built in 1984 I believe; it was nine or 10 years old. That's the laundry part. They were also stating, we're going to close the hospital and then we would have to put in a new steam plant, the old steam plant isn't efficient. So there was a high number of things going on in Calgary and the General Hospital was right at the centre of it. This was just another thing that was happening.

Q: So you bid on it and you weren't the successful bidder. Then what happened?

LF: After they had the meetings to give us the notice that morning, this was first thing in the morning, we then went up to CUPE Local 8 and the director and employer went up to the laundry. They have a cafeteria upstairs and they had all the laundry workers there. At that spot they announced to the laundry workers that the laundry was closing. At the same time, the people from AU had gone back to the Foothills Hospital. So they met with our group first. There was myself and Keeley and a director of that department talking with the laundry workers, and there were a couple of people from human resources there. After they announced that, they actually did a strange thing in my mind, but they actually did. They left myself and Susan with the laundry workers to talk to them. They left the building and went, well we have to get up to the Foothills Hospital now and explain to those people. We had the ability to talk with the group. The emotion and the anger, to say the least, was very high. And it was high, and understandably. They weren't just angry with the employer; now they were also angry with us. As being part of the process, they felt that we also failed them. The turning point for everything was when we asked them if anybody was feeling sick. Okay, what do you mean, what's that about? I said, well you must be feeling sick over the news you've just received, and your emotions, and you would not have the ability to go back to work. So how many people think that they should be going home sick? All but two people put up their hand. So we sent them all home sick. We told the fellow that was waiting outside – at that time he was in charge of

the laundry, I don't think he had a very high status and authorization – but went and told him that the laundry workers were all going home sick, they're feeling ill, they don't have the ability to work today. He had asked me, I was walking back to make sure they were going to be all heading home, when I was walking back he asked me, will they be back? I said, well not if I can help it. Then we set a meeting that evening for 7 o'clock. So everybody went home. We rented out across the street with the Bridgeland Community, so we were successful in having ability to use their hall to have the meeting with everybody. So they didn't go on strike at that point, they just left the building. We then had the meeting at 7. We had also communicated with AU and had invited their reps and their members if they would like to attend the meeting as observers. It was at that point that a motion was made to actually set up the picket lines the next day at 5 in the morning, because it was discussed. Of course, once again, in that meeting emotions were high. There was the same two people that were the only two that voted opposed to the concept of going on strike. We had also during the day, CUPE Local 8's office was kitty corner to the General Hospital, and we had the signs downstairs. They were old signs with writing on them. We took the staple gun, took the cardboard off, reversed it around so they were blank, and we took them with us to the meeting so that people at the process, once the vote was made, they were able to fill out their signs and put whatever they felt about the process. We were pretty much looking to say this was something that needed to happen.

Q: What were the main demands?

LF: That it not be contracted out, that was it. That was the whole process, that was what the whole strike was about for them. So the lines were set up at 5 o'clock the next morning. Also an interesting part that local 8 didn't do but one of the laundry members did, had phoned Global News, so they were waiting outside the door. Once the announcement was made or once we had completed the meeting, then they actually were there to interview me and I indicated to them that we would be setting up at 5 o'clock in the morning. That's how the human resources found out about it – they were watching the 11 o'clock news. So they found out that, guess what, picket signs were going up. We went

up the next day; the signs went up at 5 o'clock. Everybody did show up. What the idea was is that the trucks moved early in the morning from the laundry; so the intent was to stop the trucks from moving out. That took place from about 5 o'clock to 8 o'clock. Everybody said okay, well they actually needed a break at that time, because the emotions had been this high to all of a sudden they'd now done that. So everybody left and we came back at 2 o'clock; then the whole process escalated at a high pace from there. The Thursday night we actually went to a meeting that AUPE was having with their laundry workers; so we were invited to that meeting. At that meeting they also passed the motion that the next day they were going to set up their picket signs. So first it was the General Hospital laundry that went out, the next day the Foothills group set up their picket signs, and from that point, the Thursday and Friday, different departments started to come out of the hospital. It just kept growing. The Holy Cross, which really had no laundry workers and weren't really involved, they also set up picket signs and the support staff walked out. Carewest is a public-funded nursing home; their group walked out. They were also part of Local 8. Intercare was a private nursing home, and their group walked out. Not everybody walked out but the basis of it is there were enough people there. So all of a sudden we were in a situation where it wasn't necessarily about the laundry. One of the things that people told us that were on the picket lines is, my boss wanted to know what I was doing here. So there was internal support.

Q: People were looking at a pretty wide walkout.

LF: Internally, labour was now starting to meet also, like not just the public sector or private sector or AFL, people were setting up meetings to discuss their role in the process. Unfortunately now that I look at it, after the second day I never spent a lot of time on the picket line. I was spending more time administratively with the meetings of everything else that was going on in the process, the negotiations with the regional health authorities. In my world that's where things were going on, so I moved into an administrative role of developing everything that was going on. One of the things that helped us is the laundry sits facing Memorial Drive, which was a very busy intersection. It didn't take long for the laundry workers, instead of just walking up and down in front

of the laundry, they crossed the field. It's an open field. There was a community hall and there was a baseball field. They crossed the field and now they were picketing along Memorial Drive. The honk and everything and the support was overwhelming. A lot of the support was because the laundry was a small part of the healthcare system, yet it's the one that said to the Calgary Regional Health Authorities, that's enough. Everybody started to jump on that process and support that. The first day the police were there. They were informed I guess, so at 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock they were there. What I remember is I was at one end of the laundry and Keely at the other end of the laundry. All of a sudden I look over and there's Susan Keeley being escorted to the back of the police car. She's in the back of the police car and probably within half an hour there's Susan Keeley driving by and she's saying to the people, this is so and so, and this is so and so. So they themselves weren't violent or aggravated or looking to escalate this into something that could've really turned dirty and ugly. They were there to watch, and once they discovered that we were there for a purpose and there was no intention of violence, they became more user-friendly.

Q: There were other hospital workers who walked out in support.

LF: There were. At the peak of the strike over half of the General Hospital support staff was on the picket line at some time or other. There was a basis of Health Sciences is another big union in the healthcare system and the nurses, and they were meeting amongst themselves to see if they would also walk out in support. They never did at the end, but there were other ways and means that they were trying to help support. They were definitely not doing any of our work, they supported us in other ways. The interesting part was that the non-union or the administration believed, oh well we don't need the laundry workers, we'll just go in and do it ourselves. It didn't take them long to find out that's not possible.

Q: How many other places walked out, other than in Calgary?

LF: There was a laundry at Lethbridge Regional Hospital in Lethbridge. They walked out for a day. I believe there was some walkout in Edmonton, but I'm not 100% sure what was taking place in Edmonton at the time. There was a high volume of support from Calgary. Once Calgarians started to find out the plan was to actually ship the laundry to Edmonton to have it done, they were quite indignant about that. They were quite insulted that we didn't have the ability. That was part of the process: when we had abilities to get on the news, those are the things we talked about. The other thing about the media, you talk about the media, the Rutherford Show on channel 770. He's a very anti-unionized person. He was going on vacation that week. We were on 770; they actually did interviews with us and there was call-ins, but it wasn't with Rutherford, and therefore we got a very positive spin out of that, rather than the usual, oh you darned unions. Because he was gone for the week we didn't get that.

Q: ?

LF: That's one of the things we found out very quickly and that's one of the things that the government found out. As I said, nurses shut down the healthcare system; support staff have shut down hospitals. It didn't take them long. Within 24 hours they knew the kind of trouble they were in, because there was nobody doing that laundry.

April 30, 2009

. . . This was the 9th day of the strike and this was a Thursday evening. We had made arrangements to bargain with the Calgary Regional Health Authorities. They had a number of human resource people there; the director of human resources was there. The intent was that we would have the ability to bargain something that brought everybody back to work.

Q: So there was an authority there from the employer side?

LF: They had the authority. There was an impartial party from the labour board sitting at negotiations. They did not sit at the table. They sat on two chairs to the side. One was Wendy Hassen and the other person was her assistant, and they worked directly for the labour board.

Q: This was not a usually thing to happen.

LF: This is the first time I've known that to happen.

Q: Why would they want to be there or be allowed to be there?

LF: The perspective of how they actually got there is really unknown; they just sort of showed up and sat down. There was over the last nine days a number of labour board hearings over the legality of the strike taking place. There was no decision at that time from the labour board or a court injunction forcing us back to work, but they were still part and parcel. The only thing I can see is they were there to make sure that the process was ?? They had no official role and they had no authority, and they never spoke during the whole process.

Q: Somebody must have invited them.

LF: I believe the health authorities brought them in, and we didn't object to it. They were not playing a mediated role; they were not playing a role of decision making. They were only sitting there observing.

Q: Were there still issues to be resolved about the illegality of the strike?

LF: That was one of the issues that both parties brought to the table. There were two issues. There was the issue of saying, those people that walked out the door, if there was any punishment for them. Also, the perspective of those who did not walk out the door and stayed at work, the union's ability to fine them and charge them for not complying

with the circumstances of what was created. So that was an issue both parties had on the table. Perspectively speaking, we were able to resolve that fairly quickly. Both parties agreed mutually that neither party would punish anybody for walking out the door and vice versa, the union would not do any punishments for those who stayed in.

Q: There was no question it was an illegal strike.

LF: That was not an issue.

Q: Is it possible that they saw their role as making sure that all parties adhered to a peace pact?

LF: That would be good terminology to use – it was a peace pact. It was that everybody would go back to issues as normal and that neither party would go after anybody that participated or didn't participate. The laundry itself, there was only two people that did not walk out. The hospitals, it was a mixed bag about people walking out, walking back in, coming back out again. So there were some people that stayed in and crossed the line and there were some people that stayed out and never went back in until the memorandum was agreed to. There was also the issue of saying exactly what you were talking about. This was not a strike where people actually voted on the ability to say that yes, we want to walk out. So there was no vote. Well there was a vote by a small group of people and it was only that group on the picket line when it was set up originally, which was set up at the laundry. As people walked out the door, then the picket line started to expand. It started to expand around the whole General Hospital, which is probably two square blocks or even further. When you walked to the hospital, the ability to just cut across wasn't feasible. There was probably about a mile of picket line that people ended up having to walk at that hospital. Plus there were picket lines at other hospitals: the Holy Cross, the Belcher, and the Foothills.

Q: Talk about some of the processes that went on.

LF: The main contentious issue, once we got past the peace pact as you put it, became the issue of contracting out. The union's perspective was to resolve that issue at that table. Our push was that they would end any ability for them to have the ability to contract out in the future. That's what we wanted; that's what our drive was. It wasn't about money in the sense of wages. The ability for us to have the security that in the future people would be able to maintain their jobs and that other people would not come in and do it, and they wouldn't contract out the work. That was the contentious issue. We also had the issue, because of the circumstance of us being allowed into the bidding process, the other issue was the bid itself. We were not chosen as the successful bidder, so what do we do with that circumstance? We wanted that cancelled.

Q: In what ways were you successful?

LF: The part that we were successful on is that they did cancel the bid for the laundry. They did put a stoppage to contracting out for at least six months. They said they would not be doing any contracting out over the next six months. I believe there was also an ability for us then to be part of the process. Not part of the bidding process, but they would give us proper notice if they so chose to contract out, and we would be allowed to submit a business case to say why they shouldn't do it. It was back more to a system that had already been agreed to by other unions. The other thing that we were successful on in the process was that we were successful that people, if they did contract out, since we could not get no contracting out, that if they did contract out they would look at some type of severance for the individuals. That was a very key issue. At the beginning of the process one of the issues was that they maintain with the laundry workers that your jobs are gone, you're going to get your notice, but there would be no severance or financial support for you when they let them go. The severance, we didn't get the severance in a sense of what we were looking for was a monetary per week or two weeks per year of that. What we ended up getting, and that was a contentious issue and that was one of the last issues we settled, we ended up getting what was known at that time as a working severance. There was an ability for the individuals that they continued to work, that would be part and parcel of their severance. What we wanted, when the job is done you

will receive your severance accordingly. Working severance means that if they give you the proper notice, for example, if I've been there 10 years, and if you get two weeks per year you would get 20 weeks worth of pay. So if we give you 20 weeks notice, that would work away at your severance. For example, I get 20 weeks of pay, I work 14 weeks from the time I receive my notice, they would pay me the other six. We wanted a pure severance package.

Q: So you could continue working at the normal rate of pay, or you could take a severance...

LF: We wanted it to be choice. But what it was was employer choice, not employee choice. If they gave you the proper notice and said, we're going to give you 20 weeks notice and you will work for those 20 weeks, when you're done that would be considered your severance pay.

Q: What bidding issues were still on the table?

LF: One of the things they did is they actually cancelled the contract. They said, we will actually not go forward with the successful bidder, K-Bro, taking over. They would not be sending the laundry to Edmonton. But they would only give a partial agreement and it was only a temporary stay on contracting out, and that was approximately six months.

Q: ?

LF: I believe that was in 1997. That's one of the things that also changed. That didn't change that evening. The memorandum that was signed was the ability for us to get people back to work, that's what it was about. It also gave us an opportunity as we saw it at the time, okay now we have the ability to work on the future. We have some breathing room. Although it wasn't a lot of breathing room, we had the ability to work on keeping the laundry open. As I talked about before, it wasn't just an issue of contracting out the laundry, it was an issue of closing the building. They had done a lot of preliminary work

to try and have the building condemned. After the fact, after the laundry was up and running, they actually indicated to us that the laundry would stay in Calgary for at least 10 years. But this is down the road. So that evening what we seen was an opportunity to put everybody back to work and work on the perspective of saying that you shouldn't be contracting out the laundry, you should keep it in-house and you should also keep it in Calgary. So we only seen this as a stopping point. In one sense it was a stopping point to the strike, but in the other sense it was also a starting point for our ability to kickstart a process that kept the laundry in Calgary and kept it in-house with the Calgary Regional Health Authorities as the employer. We didn't see it as a full win but we seen it as an opportunity for things to happen in the future. Eventually, in 1997, they announced that they would be contracting out the laundry, although laundry would stay in Calgary for 10 years. In 2007 it actually closed. ... They received the contract two years later... They had to continue operating the plant in Calgary. At the time, from our assessment of the circumstances, the people that had walked out after the laundry workers walked out were about at the end of their ability to stay out. There was a feeling that a lot of these people would now start going back to work. The laundry workers were not pleased with the deal. They felt that in consideration of everything they went through, it did not give them their job security they were looking for. But they did go back to work.

Q: Once you had the memorandum, it went to a vote with CUPE and AUPE.

LF: One of the things that happened in the process itself, at the very beginning of the process CUPE made a conscientious decision and a vote amongst the laundry workers to walk out on strike. The next day, AUPE made the same decision as a group. From that point on we had met jointly with both parties and the members, we had a multitude of joint meetings at different community halls, and everybody was together. The issue at the end, once again we separated at the end. We were at the table together, we both walked away with the same memorandum of agreement with the Calgary Regional Health Authorities, but we took it to our principals as individuals. AUPE went off to talk to their group, CUPE went off to talk to their group, and a decision was made.

Q: What was it like at the CUPE meeting?

LF: The emotions were high. The majority of the people voted to accept the memorandum and return to work. The laundry workers as a group were quite emotionally affected by that, and they as a group were not necessarily in agreement with it. But they did accept the results and they did return the following day to the laundry. The vote was evolved by both people that had walked out and had been on the picket lines, from the other hospitals, from Calgary General Hospital, from the Holy Cross, from the Belcher. Those people that were CUPE members were at that meeting. It wasn't a high attended meeting in consideration of the numbers of peoples that we had had prior to that taking place. The meeting was Friday morning about 8 or 10 o'clock. There was not a lot of members at that meeting.

Q: It was a unique situation.

LF: That's the perspective of it. One of the things that happened is the laundry workers made the decision on their own to say, we're going to do this. Everybody else on a voluntary basis came forward and said, we're going to support you. Once they walked out the door those people were affected by the fact that they had walked out the door, left their employment, so therefore they too ended up having a part of anything that may have come out of that as far as fines, being charged. So it affected them directly. Once they walked the picket lines, the employer on an ongoing basis had the security people taking pictures, making sure they knew exactly who was on the line, and everybody was affected. It is true we did not have the ability at the end to say, here's our group of people. Normally what you do is you've got a local that's affected by a strike, you have a vote by these people, they walk out, and these are the people that will decide when they walk back in. In this case it was such a mixed bag and there was no control of it. We did have the list of people that walked the picket line, because they would receive picket pay for the time they spent on the line. They had the captains and that system was working. But when it came to the ability to vote, it got down to if you were a CUPE person working in a hospital you pretty much had the ability to be at the meeting and vote on it.

Q: So everybody had a stake in it, but it would be different.

LF: That's right. It affected some at different levels. A lot of people, their relief came when they found out that the peace pact was formulated and it was part and parcel of the memorandum. Okay now I'm fine. I came out on an emotional basis to help these people that we felt were being wronged, and now I have the ability to back in, and I'm not going to be punished for it. So there was a large group of people that was their main concern. Some of them were concerned about the ability of the employer to contract out. At that time the laundry was only the beginning of the process. There were other groups on the list that also were going to be directly affected.

Q: Once the peace pact was established, that ended it for the laundry workers.

LF: That's right. Once they went back in... Public opinion was starting to shift. The newspapers had been very generous in their approach to this and their documentation and publication of what was going on. But that was starting to change a bit in the papers. The other thing is, there was a strong feeling, at least amongst us that were at the negotiating table, that the amnesty was coming to an end. In other words, if it continued beyond the timeframe of that meeting on the Thursday evening, that now the fines would come in and people would start getting arrested. The dynamics would change. ... My memory fails me on if the labour board actually made a ruling that we were illegally on strike. I believe there might have been something to that degree, but it was never acted on. If I remember correctly, Calgary Regional Health Authorities next stop was going to be the courts.

Q: What was it that kept the labour board from exercising their authority?

LF: I don't have the answer on that. The only speculation I can see is that because within a few days of the strike taking place and the public momentum that went on, and the government now starting to step in on the fringes of what was happening, and the

government also putting themselves into a position of actually Ralph Klein was even on the news over the issue of the strike itself. I believe he said something about, I'm not blinking. He had talked about it, but there was also in the background the government starting to make moves that they realize they had to do something with healthcare. During the strike, on the Monday or Tuesday, they announced that they actually put another \$100 million into healthcare. But it has nothing to do with the strike, but we're putting \$100 million into healthcare. Ralph Klein had also been in contact with the division president at that time, Terry Mutton.

Q: It must've been the public support.

LF: There was some public support that felt for the laundry workers when they started to hear the story. But a lot of the public support was created by the Calgary Regional Health Authorities, because their arrogance toward the public was healthcare workers. I'm not just talking about laundry workers – the nurses, the doctors, anybody connected with healthcare. Their arrogance on them just shoving and ramming everything down, that they just said this is the way it's going to be, and that's the way it is. There was very little access to the board itself. The board was trying to run healthcare like a business. The laundry workers sparked that in everybody. There was a bit of embarrassment with the doctors and other groups, because it took this group at the bottom of the pile, when it comes to healthcare, actually having the ability to stand up to the board. A lot of people seen it as standing up to the Calgary Regional Health Authorities. Standing up to the Calgary Regional Health Authorities meant you were standing up to the government, because it was their board.

Q: The laundry workers had something going for them.

LF: One of the things that became very clear very quickly is the nurses had walked out in the past and they ended up shutting down the healthcare system – that's what they do. With the laundry walking out and shutting off the machines, it shut down hospitals and it shut them down very quickly. That's when the system realized that the support staff have

a function and a place in the system, and it's a vital place and function. We're the cornerstones of the hospitals. They don't function without us. The little guys counted. The David and Goliath story, very clean and very clear.

... It was a phenomenal thing that happened because, as laundry workers, they gained so much respect in the system. That respect continued on after the strike was over. It wasn't a flash in the pan for them; it was the fact that the whole system now respected these people. They respected the work they did; they had a better understanding of the type of work it was. A lot of people in the system realized, well gee, that's not something I'd want to be doing as a work career. These people were career people. We had people who'd been in the laundry for 28, 30 years, 15 or 20 years. That was their life, that's what they did. So from that perspective in itself, that was a big win for the laundry workers and those people working there. As I said, it continued on.

Q: Was it a win for the trade union movement?

LF: It was not a win for us in the sense that ultimately they contracted out the laundry. We didn't win that fight for that group of people and that laundry. We did win because in 1995 that was the beginning of the process. First the laundry, dietary was going to go, maintenance was going to go. Those people are still working today and the Regional Health Authorities are still their employer. So we won in the fact that the health authorities changed their philosophical approach to support staff, and they started to look at us from a different perspective. But we didn't win for that laundry and those people. Those people won as individuals. Not only did they end up getting a severance in 1997, they also were educated for finding other jobs, things that were not afforded to them prior to them walking out on strike. That's a win for them.

[END]